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The Price of 'Double-Dipping'

The resignation of Admiral Stanafield Turner, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, from the Navy was entirely predictable. He may well be the most conspicuous government-employed military officer rushing to resign before Jan. 10. On that date, modest restrictions on "double-dipping," the practice of drawing a military pension along with a handsome civilian government salary, go into effect.

Turner's action is perfectly legal, but it points up what's wrong with the military retirement system. If allowed to continue unchecked in its present form, the system might well sink the whole concept of a voluntary military service because the country won't be able to afford both.

Last spring, a presidential commission recommended a drastic overhaul of the retirement system, and proposals were made in Congress to include new members of the armed services under the congressional retirement system and to virtually ban double-dipping. Few changes were made, however, in the face of intense opposition from veterans' organizations and the military establishment.

Now Defense Secretary Harold Brown has proposed a plan that would incorpo-

rate some of the commission's suggestions. It would cut by a quarter the pension that now becomes available after 20 years' active duty until the retiree turns 60. It would also offer severance pay to those who stay for 10 years but less than 20, as an inducement to get them to stay longer.

Pensions have risen more rapidly than any other defense outlay. They accounted for 1.5 per cent of the defense budget in 1964 and more than 8 per cent by now. When servicemen were paid a relative pittance, it made sense to offer high pensions as a reward and as an inducement. But pay has gone up steadily to make the military competitive with civilian jobs.

President Carter is expected to draw heavily on the Brown proposal when he sends a reform plan to Congress next year. Something clearly needs to be done; if the present system continues unchecked, retirement pensions will cost the taxpayers some \$34 billion by 1997, and \$100 billion in 40 years. We doubt the voters will stand still for that, which is something for Congress to remember when the vets turn on their formidable anti-reform pressure in the next session.